

COVID-19 outbreak at North Hastings Community Centre raises alarm in Bancroft



By Nate Smelle

Last week, Canadians surpassed two tragic milestones, as the death toll from COVID-19 surpassed 10,000 in Ontario, and 30,000 nationwide. The current surge underway in Canada is inline with a rapidly growing number of cases being reported globally. In the past 28 days, the death toll due to COVID-19 worldwide added another 202,631 names.

Provincially, Ontario reported another 7,237 cases in the 48 hours before Bancroft This Week went to press on Tuesday, Dec. 21. As of the same time, there were 165 people fighting COVID-19 in the province's Intensive Care Units. A day earlier, the province reported its highest test positivity rate (9.7 per cent) in more than seven months.

This surge in cases is also being mirrored in the local tallies by the Hastings and Prince Edward Public Health Unit. On Monday, Dec. 20 the health unit reported another 146 new cases over the weekend ? 10 of which are in North Hastings. At that time the health unit confirmed that there are 16 active cases currently in the Bancroft area.

The Hastings and Prince Edward Public Health Unit also announced that there are currently: 365 active cases; 27 outbreaks; 12 hospitalizations; and, five people in local Intensive Care Units. HPEPH also indicated that there has been a total of 2,343 cases between the two counties; and, 17 people who have died of COVID-19.

In addition, on Saturday, Dec. 18, the local health unit sent out a media release, alerting the public that individuals who had attended the North Hastings Community Centre at 103 Newkirk Boulevard in Bancroft from Dec. 7 to Dec. 18 could have been exposed to COVID-19. Noting that the Town of Bancroft and the North Hastings Community Centre have been working with HPEPH to respond to the situation, the health unit advised everyone who attended the North Hastings Community Centre between the aforementioned dates to:

? Monitor closely for symptoms of COVID-19.? If symptoms develop, even mild ones such as a runny nose or sore throat, isolate at home and away from others, and only leave isolation to seek testing or medical care.? To seek testing, book an appointment online for the Bancroft testing centre. Individuals can also call 613-332-2825 ext. 6224.? For other testing options, please visit: hpePublicHealth.ca/getting-tested-for-covid-19/.When seeking testing, please provide investigation number 2238-2021-53773 to the testing centre.

Reminding the public that the 'COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective'; and that 'vaccination is the best way to protect yourself and those you care about from COVID-19,' the health unit encouraged everyone to get vaccinated, and get their booster shot as soon as they become eligible.

To book an appointment for COVID-19 vaccination, visit: covid-19.ontario.ca/book-vaccine for booking details.

Many pharmacies also offer COVID-19 vaccination and offer evening and weekend hours. Find pharmacies offering vaccine at: covid-19.ontario.ca/vaccine-locations.

While HPEPH's dashboard indicates that there are 16 active cases in North Hastings, the Bancroft Family Health Team said there are actually well over 20 active cases in the Bancroft area at the moment. According to a post on the local health team's Facebook page, the reason for the discrepancy in the number of active cases is because individuals could be residing in the area temporarily for work, school or other recreation and sporting activities. The Bancroft Family Health Team also acknowledged that HPEPH's numbers do not account for cases in individuals who are new to the area and did not update their address with Service Ontario.

In the same media release, the health team also reported that new positive cases had been confirmed at North Hastings High School.

With the rapid increase of COVID-19 cases in the region causing a backlog in Hastings and Prince Edward Public Health's case and contact management process, the health team said there will be a delay 'potentially more than 48 hours' in contacting individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 and their high-risk contacts. In the meantime, for those who do test positive the health team recommends that they do their own contact tracing to help limit the spread.

For more information about this, please visit: <https://hpepublichealth.ca/media-release-hpeph/> BFHT is asking anyone feeling unwell who might be experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19 to stay home and get tested. Symptoms of COVID-19 include:

'Fever? Muscle aches? Chills and sweats? Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing? Dry, persistent cough? Shortness of breath? Tiredness and weakness? Runny or stuffy nose? Sore throat? Headache? Vomiting and diarrhea? Other symptoms of COVID-19 may include a loss of taste or smell, pinkeye, nausea and chest pain.

To get tested, contact the COVID-19 hotline at: 613-961-5544; or locally at: 613-332-2825 ext. 6224. Individuals can also pre-register for an appointment at: <https://www.qhc.on.ca/pre-register-for-covid-assessment>.

With the more transmissible Omicron variant of the coronavirus now putting its foot down heavily across Canada and around the world, governments are again imposing strict restrictions in an attempt to subdue the rising number of infections.

On Friday, Dec. 17 the Ontario Science Advisory Table reported that the number of Omicron cases of COVID-19 are doubling approximately every 2.8 days. At this rate, they project that before Christmas Day the daily case count could climb to over 6,000 'the highest in Canada since the start of the pandemic.

Premier Doug Ford addressed the heightened concern over the Omicron variant of COVID-19 in Ontario during a press conference on Dec. 17. Noting that Omicron is the most transmissible variant of the coronavirus to arise yet, Ford said over the coming days and weeks the number of cases of COVID-19 will continue to accelerate. Likewise, he said the number of people being admitted to Ontario's Intensive Care Units 'especially those who are unvaccinated' is also expected to increase sharply before the new year.

'Nothing will stop the spread of Omicron,' Ford said. 'It's just too transmissible. What we can do, and what we're doing, is slowing it as much as possible to allow more time for shots to get into arms' The Omicron variant is unlike anything we've seen, and if we don't take every single precaution we can do the modeling tells a scary story. To the other jurisdictions right now the United Kingdom is facing a tidal wave of Omicron infections threatens the entirety of their whole system is a very it was first detected that scenario to take hold here the UK experience is an urgent call for action.'

At this time, Ford said that it was too soon to determine whether students will go back to their classrooms in Ontario after the holiday break. That same morning, the province reported that 382 schools in Ontario were dealing with an active outbreak. They also indicated that as of Dec. 17 there were 72 schools closed throughout the province due to COVID-19. This was the second highest number of school closures since the start of the pandemic in January 2020.

In response to what experts are predicting could be the worst wave of the pandemic yet, the provincial government imposed several new public health measures aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 in Ontario. Starting Monday, Dec. 20 all Ontarians 18 years of age or older became eligible to receive a booster shot of the COVID-19 vaccine.

With the holiday break just around the corner, a time when many families like to hold it together to celebrate, the Ford government has reduced the limit on the number of people allowed to gather indoors in one place from 25 to a maximum of 10. The maximum number of people attending a social gathering outdoors has also been cut back from 100 to 25. Beginning on Saturday, Dec. 18 the province also placed capacity limits on larger venues that host crowds of 1,000+, reducing the maximum number of attendees by 50 per cent. The province has also banned food and drinks at sporting events, concert venues, theatres, and bingo halls. At this point, the government has not placed capacity limit on weddings and funerals, as long as guests wear a mask and practice social distancing.

The capacity limit on bars and restaurants in Ontario was reduced to 50 per cent as well. Bars and restaurants also must send out the last call for alcohol at 10 p.m., and close their doors by 11 p.m.

A 50 per cent capacity limit has also been placed on grocery stores, shopping malls, pharmacies, and personal care services.

In addition, starting on Tuesday, Dec. 21 anyone entering Canada must provide a negative COVID-19 PCR before arriving in the country. These new measures apply to all travellers, including those who have been out of the country for less than 72 hours.